

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Chair Brenda Mallory
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20506

May 3, 2023

Dear Chair Mallory:

We are writing to request information on the Council of Environmental Quality's (CEQ) activities concerning the federal Columbia-Snake River System. On March 28, 2022, CEQ published a blog post entitled, "Columbia River Basin Fisheries: Working Together to Develop a Path Forward,"¹ in which CEQ indicated it had convened nation-to-nation consultation between federal agencies and leaders and representatives from the Tribes of the Columbia River Basin to discuss the impact of the Columbia-Snake River System on Pacific Salmon. The blog post also indicated the Biden administration had convened an interagency group to "identify a durable path forward that ensures a clean energy future, supports local and regional economies, and restores ecosystem function, while honoring longstanding commitments to Tribal Nations."

As part of this blog post, CEQ also announced it had engaged the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) to "facilitate a transparent and productive public policy dialogue with all of the sovereigns and stakeholders in the region," and further invited members of the public to share information using the email salmon@ceq.eop.gov.

In March 2023, after months of confidential mediation sessions involving the defendants and plaintiffs in *National Wildlife Federation et al. v. National Marine Fisheries Service et al.* [01-640], FMCS, on behalf of CEQ, announced public listening sessions to provide members of the public an opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns about the future of the Columbia-Snake River System with representatives from the U.S. Government. The FMCS held two listening sessions, with a third scheduled for May 25, 2023.

To better understand CEQ's actions and approach regarding public participation in developing a path forward for the Columbia-Snake River System, we request answers to the following questions:


1. What is the purpose of the salmon@ceq.eop.gov inbox?
2. Who monitors the inbox?


¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/news-updates/2022/03/28/columbia-river-basin-fisheries-working-together-to-develop-a-path-forward/>


3. How many comments has the inbox received? How many of the comments are distinct, substantive comments (versus mass comments using the same or similar templates)?
4. How are these comments directed to the interagency group?
5. How is the interagency group weighing these comments in the decisions it makes concerning the Columbia-Snake River System?
6. Will these comments be formally incorporated into the FMCS mediation process?
7. Will the comments be published in the Federal Register or other public forum?
8. Which federal entity sponsored the March and April 2023 public listening sessions on the future of the Columbia-Snake River system?
 - a. Did the sponsoring federal entity work with any other federal entities in planning the listening sessions? If so, which ones?
9. What is the purpose of the public listening sessions?
10. Are the public listening sessions part of the FMCS process?
11. How were interested parties notified of the opportunity to participate in the public listening sessions?
12. Did CEQ provide FMCS with any notification distribution lists to inform the public about the opportunity to participate in the listening sessions? If so, how were these lists developed? Please provide these distribution lists and the dates on which CEQ provided them to FMCS.
13. How will input provided during the public listening sessions be weighed by the interagency group in the decisions it makes concerning the future of the Columbia-Snake River System?
14. How were participants interested in speaking during the public listening sessions selected? Please provide the list of all participants who indicated they were interested in speaking.
15. If listening session participants were interested in speaking but not selected for a speaking slot, will there be an opportunity for them to submit comments through another medium? How will those comments be incorporated into the FMCS process? Will those comments be weighed in the same manner as comments shared during the listening sessions?

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to a prompt response.

Sincerely,


James E. Risch
United States Senator


Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress


Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress